



## Department of Veterans Affairs

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### Leaders Recognized for Their Service to South Dakota's Veterans

PIERRE, S.D. – County and tribal veterans' service officers (CTVSO) and staff from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) were recognized for their dedication to serving veterans and veterans' families at an awards program Tuesday, Aug. 25, in Pierre.

The annual event, organized by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, was held in conjunction with the veterans' benefits training conference for CTVSOs.

"The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and our VSOs are here to serve all veterans from every conflict and every generation who have defended our nation and the American way of life," said Larry Zimmerman, SDDVA secretary. "It is important to recognize individuals who provide outstanding service. These leaders enhance the lives of our veterans and their families."

Senator Mike Rounds, a member of the United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, joined the CTVSOs and the SDDVA staff at their annual steak-fry on Monday evening. Rounds asked this team of leaders to share with him the challenges and roadblocks they are facing with the VA and asked the group for ideas to resolve these issues.

"Our nation's veterans and their families sacrifice everything to protect and defend our country and keep us safe," said Rounds. "We have an obligation to care for them when their mission is complete. The staff at the SDDVA and county and tribal veterans' service officers work tirelessly to make certain our veterans receive the benefits they have been promised. Given the challenges within the national VA, our work at the local level, advocating for our veterans, is more important than ever and has a direct and positive impact on the lives of military families. I'm very proud of this year's award recipients for going above and beyond to make certain South Dakota veterans receive what they are due."

Lt. Governor Matt Michels was the keynote speaker during the Tuesday night banquet and presented awards to the leaders within the network.

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Manaja Hill of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe received the CTVSO of the Year Award, which distinguishes Manaja as the 2015 County Veterans Service Officer of the Year. Manaja was recognized for his outstanding commitment to veterans, work with homeless veterans, compensated work therapy program, communication with veterans and outreach coordination.

Jessica Davidson of Davison County in Mitchell received the Outreach of the Year Award, which distinguishes Jessica as the 2015 leader in conducting outreach activities. Jessica was recognized for her outstanding commitment to veterans, introduction of social media to her veterans, coordination of outreach events and involving the community in supporting our veterans.

Sheila Carpenter, veteran's services claims assistant for the Hughes, Stanley and Sully County VSO office in Pierre, was awarded the 2015 Partner of the Year Award. Carpenter was recognized for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota's veterans.

Krystal Magee, SDDVA claims examiner, was awarded the SDDVA 2015 Employee of the Year Award. Magee was recognized for her commitment to their partners and her dedication to packaging claims. "Krystal is known for training and mentoring her peers to ensure success in filing of claims," said SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. "Krystal has a unique drive to take on more responsibility and constantly demonstrating her strengths as a young leader within our Department and our network."

Former VSO's Richard Beringer (Bon Homme County), Kenneth Lindblad (Beadle and Sanborn Counties) and Wayne Vetter (Faulk County) were recognized by the County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Association for their years of service to South Dakota's veterans.

(Photos available upon request)